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ABSTRACT

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and eighteenth century essayist, offered an important piece of advice to writers--talk to yourself. Some composition texts still recommend various forms of internal dialogue as a means of constructing prophetic argument or internalizing a critical voice, but current instructional emphasis has been on audience awareness. Shaftesbury's "desert island discourse" leaves the writer in a self-contained rhetorical situation, in which the self comes to represent a universal audience, and what is decided internally is used in public persuasion. But the author who is anxious to accommodate an audience can become an "author-character"--a public persona--whose thought process is corrupted by his anxiety in the presence of an imagined public, leading ultimately to a loss of identity. In the case of student writing with the composition professor as audience, the results are familiar: inflated diction, formal tone, meticulous attention to "rules," whether appropriate or not. Shaftesbury sees two distinct personas in the individual, which he calls Reason and Appetite, or wisdom and self-interest. Language, for him, is the quintessential tool of self-deception, especially when employed by Appetite, or that worse voice within the self. For Shaftesbury, the mind must confront its own rhetoric and identify its own better half--only then will soliloquy become the route to true knowledge. The person who recognizes his or her inner wisdom can use it to make valid judgments, not only about rhetoric but about life. The soliloquy itself will be, for students, a venture into an alternate epistemological system, a different model of the mind. (NKA)

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The Internal Voices of Invention:
Shaftesbury's Soliloquy

I'm sure that some of you are wondering what Shaftesbury has to do with composition theory. Well, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, was an 18th century essayist with a wide array of interests. In his major work, Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc., he has something to say to almost everyone, including aspiring authors. One of the essays of Characteristics is titled Soliloquy or Advice to Authors; in it, Shaftesbury offers an important piece of advice--talk to yourself. As he puts it, "'Tis the hardest thing in the world to be a good thinker without being a strong self-examiner and thorough-paced dialogist in this solitary way" (Sol., 1:112)

This advice was already on its way out in Shaftesbury's time; the invention techniques of classical rhetoric, including dialectical inquiry, were being replaced by the modes of scientific inquiry, which according to Berlin still dominate composition pedagogy today, in what he calls the Positivist-Traditional school. Composition texts do recommend various forms of dialogue, as a means of constructing proleptic argument or internalizing a critical voice. Most of these forms, however,

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use an imagined other in the conversation; talking to yourself in a pure way, in what Elbow has recently tagged "desert island discourse" (57), is a technique still somewhat suspect to most composition instructors.

And with good reason. As Elbow also points out in his recent article, "Closing My Eyes As I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience," much composition research has validated the need to teach students to be aware of their audiences. Elbow, like Shaftesbury, is offering exactly the opposite advice--there are times when it's important to ignore the audience. Elbow concludes that the ability to do that, to "turn off audience awareness--especially when it confuses thinking or blocks discourse--is also a 'higher skill'" (56). Shaftesbury thinks of it as the primary skill. He insists that soliloquy, private conversation with the self, must precede any attempt to address the public.

That insistence might seem strange to those of us confronting the sometimes entirely private and thus opaque discourse of our students. Shaftesbury's soliloquy, however, is not an unregulated private conversation. It is internal dialogue, a strictly structured exchange of questions and answers. And its effects are complex: like all "desert island discourse," it allows the writer to escape any particular imagined audience. It leaves her, however, in a self-contained rhetorical situation, in which the self comes to represent a

universal audience. The knowledge gained in the soliloquy is not the inarticulate insight that Berlin ascribes to Platonic invention, the truth that "can be discovered but cannot be communicated" (771). It is instead both private and public, a paradox that Isocrates noted long ago: ". . . for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ when we deliberate in our thoughts" (Isocrates, 327).

Unfortunately, Isocrates doesn't indicate here the order of these two activities. Shaftesbury's soliloquy, like Elbow's desert island discourse, assumes that the private conversation comes first; what we have decided internally is what we use as public persuasion. But the reverse is also possible; what we see as appropriate public discourse becomes the stuff of our internal conversation. This pattern recalls the Vygotskian model of internalized social discourse that many composition theorists have found useful. Shaftesbury, however, sees a danger in the reversal. The author anxious to accomodate an audience becomes an "author-character" (Sol., 1:109), a public persona, whose thought process is corrupted by his anxiety. He no longer thinks in private, but in the presence of an imagined public, before whom he parades his ideas, anticipating their reactions. Such thinking, Shaftesbury warns, ultimately leads to a loss of identity. The real author disappears into the "character," who will never be certainly defined, "but suits himself on every

occasion to the fancy of his readers, whom as the fashion is nowadays, he constantly caresses and cajoles"(Sol., 1:131).

Students are particularly vulnerable to this dangerous reversal of public and private conversation. The two prerequisites are there: a highly developed sense of audience, and a sharp anxiety about pleasing them. Students become, for their professors, a particular type of "author-character," the good student. We are all familiar with the results: inflated diction, formal tone, meticulous attention to "rules," whether appropriate or not. Their written work may be flat, thoughtless, or even ridiculous; its author had an audience firmly in mind, nonetheless. Most of us agree that students have a need to escape this threatening audience, the professor, so that they can think for themselves. And we have all employed a variety of strategies to allow this escape: the substitution of a less threatening audience, in the peer editing group; or various forms of private writing, in invention exercises and journals. But for Shaftesbury, escape is only the first step; authors must still deal with the elusive nature of their own thoughts.

Private conversation, in its unregulated form, is not necessarily any clearer than public. "One would think there was nothing easier for us than to know our own minds, . . ." Shaftesbury observes. "But our thoughts have generally such an obscure implicit language that 'tis the hardest thing in the world to make them speak distinctly"(Sol., 1:113). Student

writers put the dilemma less eloquently but just as accurately; "I know what I want to say, but I can't get it in words." The problem, according to Shaftesbury, is epistemological. Even when we turn away from our public, we are not alone. The mind, he says, is "two persons in one individual self" (Sol., 1:121). Most of us have had the experience of being of "two minds" about something, at odds with ourselves. Shaftesbury's epistemology asserts that this state is not intermittent, but constant. And the two persons are distinct, in a Platonic scheme of better and worse. Shaftesbury calls them Reason and Appetite; what he meant by those terms might be clearer to us as wisdom and self-interest. They operate, Shaftesbury suggests, just below the level of consciousness, in a silent conflict. Soliloquy gives them voice. But this internal dialogue, although entirely private, is rhetorical. And as the two voices attempt to persuade each other, we begin to see a difference between them, not so much in the nature of the arguments offered as in the rhetoric employed:

> Those on the side of the elder brother Appetite are strangely subtle and insinuating. They have always the faculty to speak by nods and winks. By this practice they conceal half their meaning, and, like modern politicians, pass for deeply wise, and adorn themselves with the finest pretexts and most specious glosses imaginable; till, being confronted with their fellows

> of a plainer language and expression, they are forced to quit their mysterious manner, and discover themselves mere sophisters and impostors who have not the least to do with the party of reason and good sense. (Sol., 1:123-4)

"Desert island discourse" is not necessarily honest; language, for Shaftesbury, is the quintessential tool of self-deception, especially as it is employed by that worse voice within the self. The existence of this subtle yet powerful rhetorician within compromises the workings of any straightforward heuristic scheme. Soliloquy is not straightforward. It can lead to true self-knowledge because it recognizes the self-deceptive power of the mind. And it teaches us to distinguish the devious, untrustworthy voices in ourselves by a process of rhetorical analysis. Those who rely on style to mask a lack of substance are the ones we must suspect.

But audiences, we might insist, have particular needs, which the skilled rhetorician must address. How can the audience of the self, that soliloguy addresses, serve as a credible substitute for these other audiences? In a practical way, it can't. Effective rhetoric must take its particular audience into account. But not all audiences are particular. Aristotle, according to McKeon, distinguishes between

> the particular audiences of rhetoric and the universal audience of dialectic. Arguments can be adapted to the

> predilections of groups or communities of men. They can also be framed so that anyone who uses art or intelligence can follow them and appreciate them. ("Uses" 62)

McKeon points to a similar split in Augustine, who divides rhetoric into the temporal, which deals with this world, and the eternal, or divine, "by which a master speaking within us teaches the truth" ("Middle Ages" 179).

Certainly these two distinctions do not strictly parallel Shaftesbury's division of Appetite and Reason, but all three schemes suggest that any audience can be reached by an appeal to the highest human faculty. And since every human has this same highest faculty, the self becomes the best possible representative of the most universal audience. These faculties differ, of course, for Aristotle, "art and intelligence," for Augustine, the voice of divine wisdom, and for Shaftesbury, Reason. Reason is actually a mix of the other two; it is most intelligent because it reflects divinely implanted ideas of value. Shaftesbury stalwartly resisted the epistemology of his mentor, Locke, and held to the notion of innate concepts of the good, true, and beautiful in the human mind. These concepts, however, are not immediately accessible; one can not simply take them out, like ethical yardsticks, to measure the arguments which present themselves to us. They become apparent only when the mind has confronted its <u>own</u> rhetoric, and identified its own better half.

On a final level, then, soliloquy becomes the route to true knowledge. The person who recognizes her inner wisdom can use it to make valid judgments, not only about rhetoric but about life. Shaftesbury, the philosopher, is heading for this level all along. His advice to authors expands to include all of us; authors may have a more pressing need for self-knowledge, but certainly not an exclusive one. Why should the teacher of rhetoric be concerned with this level? Here I turn to Berlin's warning that theoretical assumptions underlie and determine our rhetorical pedagogy. As he says,

> To teach writing is to argue for a version of reality, and the best way of knowing and communicating it--to deal, as Paul Kameen has pointed out, in the metarhetorical realm of epistemology and linguistics. And all composition teachers are ineluctably operating in this realm, whether or not they consciously choose to do so. (766)

Shaftesbury's soliloquy offers our students not only a technique for examining their ideas, but a different model of the mind. They will not necessarily perceive the subtleties of this inner division, the implications of private rhetoric, universal audience, and inherent value systems that I have been suggesting. But the soliloquy itself will be for them a venture into a epistemological system that has not prevailed in the 20th century. It offers an alternate "version of reality," a

different way of knowing, and perhaps a glimpse of the epistemological underpinnings of rhetoric itself.

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